



# Mission of a Lifetime

*"Everyone has an opportunity to be great because everyone has an opportunity to serve."*

*-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Enthusiasm. Passion. Zeal. These words all come to mind when talking with Paulette Martin about her mission in life – adult education.

"To me, adult education is a mission," she says, "and it's a mission that I love."

It's also a mission to which she has devoted her life. Paulette has spent the past 39 years in adult education. During that time, she established the adult education program in Pine Bluff in 1967. Ten years later, she brought adult education to the Little Rock School District, where she continues to serve as the program director.

Paulette's dedication to adult education stems from the generational impact it can have on entire families. "I feel that when you reach the parent and can change the parent's attitude about education, it sort of filters down," she says. Parents who get excited about education become more involved in their children's education, and their children start doing better in school.

Over the years, Paulette has witnessed firsthand the transforming power of education. She says she gets a "special joy" from working with adults who are learning basic skills, such as reading and writing. She also takes pride in seeing "her" students graduate with their GEDs. One student who stands out graduated from the Little Rock program the first year it was running. That student went on to work for the Little Rock program until she retired 19 years later.

Paulette's passion also shows up in the numerous leadership positions she has taken. Whether serving on the state advisory board or as president of the administrators' group or the Arkansas Association of Continuing and Adult Education, Paulette hasn't shied away from the challenges facing adult education in Arkansas.

The biggest challenge she sees is funding. Since adult education teachers are certified and tied to state teacher funding, they get the same raise as all public school teachers. While the state increases the Department of Education's budget to cover teacher salary hikes, it does

not provide a corresponding budget increase to adult education. In fact, the funding for adult education has not increased since 1992 – despite numerous mandated teacher pay raises. The result is that adult education services suffer, Paulette says, and fewer adult students can be served each year.

Another challenge is providing transportation and child care services to adult students. While the adult education classes are free, many students cannot afford child care or transportation to attend the classes.

The third challenge is the ongoing nature of adult education. As long as young people continue to drop out of high school, there will be a need for adult education, Paulette says.

The years of service and challenge have not dulled Paulette's sense of mission as she looks forward to each new success story adult education produces. And those years of dedication have added to her stature in the adult education community.

Speaking on behalf of that community, George French, deputy director of DWE's Adult Education Section, says, "Paulette Martin is the epitome of what adult education is all about. She is dependable and conscientious; she is always willing to serve in any capacity. Most of all, Paulette is the picture of adult education in Arkansas."



*An integral part of adult education in Arkansas, Paulette Martin receives the Adult Education Week proclamation from Gov. Mike Huckabee.*